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The Proper Mousing Cat is Buried With Soldiers

And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze fetters; and he ground at the mill in the prison.

– Judges 16:21

The doctor has warned against prose, poetry
could be fatal – too like swallowing
one's own tongue. Puffy, strangled,
as rigor mortis sets in:
a Tantalus pose, with book of verse

in hand. So he has retired to the sun:
a lawn chair, orange and green, frayed warp
and weft nestling into the dirt. The garden
once grew with lettuce, parsley and carrots

for vision. Now grass has grown up
around the rusting red lawn
mower so little depends
upon. The children have grown too, gone
away, a murder of crows
in the Basho tree, ripe with brown fruit.

From the open patio door, saxophone Lester
Leaps In, the sound of spit air
over reed, disc player on infinite
repeat. The open glass door frames
where she used to be, preparing
Shirley Horn's Beef and Beer, her

too stiff pavane around the kitchen just before
the beginning of sunset. In early summertime
she sang "Una voce poco fa," or at least humming
the tune. Lester Young, sax man, reduced
to vamping off stage.

The tarot cards were always stored
above the heart. To be laid
late on Saturday night. After making
love, perhaps. The smell of Sulphur
from struck matches, and sweat,
and the salt feel of love knots woven
into the Persian rug against her
lower back and shoulder blades. A coded message:

come and kiss me, once, quickly. The proper mousing cat
would purr and purr and purr, buried
now out back with the plastic
plank-footed soldiers. The youngest child
dug a tiger trap, excavated lost languages,
spoke in new tongues. Funeral black, please,
for the soldiers and cat, he said.

Here is the view to the west
from the garden chair now:
the neighbour with an oddly curved
spine from the decade spent
with children perched on her hips, though also
climbing mountains at odd angles,
commas for eyebrows. Bent, now

over her full
heads of lettuce and climbing
sweet peas and he's imagining her well-kept

lawn. He knows her for her walk, and brown-
spotted skin under
sunglasses, straw hat, shorts the colour
of tuberose plants that nestle against
the house. In the lawn chair, he contemplates

The Proposed Demolition of Nineteen Churches
in London. His three languages shored-up
in coves for later recovery. Yes, this beard
must surely start to grow again
what with all the sun. Lester leaps in

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

Tequila

Single life is—tequila with lime,
shots of travelers, jacks, diamonds, and then spades,
holding back aces—
mocking jokers
paraplegic aged tumblers of the night trip.
Poltergeist define as another frame,
a dancer in the corner shadows.
Single lady don't eat the worm.
beneath the belt, bashful, very loud, yet unspoken.
Your man lacks verb, a traitor to your skin.